

Narrator:

For World AIDS Day 2009, America.gov spoke with Ambassador Eric Goosby, U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, also known as PEPFAR. We took questions from America.gov's Facebook page. Nirvadhya asked about HAART therapy and how rehabilitative services are making a difference, especially for children.

Ambassador Eric Goosby:

HAART stands for Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Treatment. It's a term that was coined in 1996-97 when the discovery of Protease Inhibitors when Ritonavir and Saquinavir was first obtained by Roche Pharmaceuticals. That triggered an era where anti-retroviral treatment went from being largely ineffective for periods greater than 18 months to being remarkably effective for an undetermined length of time. We now know for greater than 14 years, these anti-retrovirals, the highly active anti-retrovirals, have the ability to suppress viral replication really indefinitely as long as the person can take the medication and tolerate it. And that has stopped progression in the individual, dropped their infectivity, and allows them to go back to a normal life. I'm talking about anybody who's on them. Children specifically – the reference to using HAART at birth is something that is, in the last two years, the literature has supported using three-drug antiretroviral HAART therapy in children at the point of four weeks after birth and what happens in these children is their brain development and growth development stays on a normal growth curve for brain circumference, body length, weight, and we now have followed children long enough to see some of the children started on HAART in the late '90's – close friend of mine who is a pediatrician has his first child that he started on HAART actually starting medical school. You return to a normal, or at least what appears to be a normal brain development and growth curve pattern. So the treatment now for children who are HIV-positive really has shifted to recommend that they start anti-retrovirals about a month after birth, start Co-trimoxazole which is a medication that stops the common infections that kill the baby at that same time and continue them.